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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000007

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BASRA PROVINCIAL ELECTION A SUCCESS

REF: A) BASRAH 0001; B) 2008 BASRAH 0081

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark O'Connor, Deputy Director, Regional Embassy Office Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: In a February 11 meeting with the REO, Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) Director Hazim Jodah expressed satisfaction with his staff's performance during the election and noted that representatives from various political entities had expressed similar sentiments. He praised the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) for providing a safe environment for voters and said he was content with the 50 percent voter turnout, although that figure was much lower than generally expected. He also addressed the highly-publicized problem of name discrepancies on voter registration lists and dismissed rumors of Iranian-backed malfeasance. End summary.

Pleased Overall

¶12. (C) Jodah said he was very pleased with the results of the efforts of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) during the recent provincial elections. He characterized the local election process in Basra as smooth and transparent, adding that many political party leaders, including some with disappointing results from the polls, had congratulated him on IHEC's performance. Jodah was particularly impressed with the ISF, which he praised for preventing security threats while consistently applying the law. He related one story in which he directed members of his staff to deliver a note to an IHEC manager at a district polling center. Under Iraqi law, no paper of any kind is allowed to enter or exit a polling center while votes are being counted. Consequently, ISF prevented the IHEC employees from entering the building. Although an inconvenience to Jodah, he was impressed that the ISF had strictly enforced the law.

Faulty Voter Registration

¶13. (C) While generally content, Jodah acknowledged one problem that received considerable media attention. About 100 would-be voters did not find their names on the voter registration list when they appeared at polling stations to vote. Furthermore, IHEC staff was required to deny several hundred additional individuals access to the polls, because the names on their identification documents did not exactly match the voter registration list. While Jodah admitted that printing errors may have been responsible for some of these cases, he believed that most all of them were the fault of the individual. He clarified that most of the public failed to verify their voter registration information during the six-week summer registration drive. (See reftel B) Had they done this, Jodah added, they

would have discovered any discrepancies. Jodah believed that a fair number of people mistakenly thought they did not need to verify the accuracy of their personal information on the registration list in summer 2008, because they had done so in 2004 and 2005.

Fewer Complaints

¶4. (C) Jodah pointed out the remarkably low number of serious complaints filed with IHEC on election day. Official complaint forms were available at every polling station and yet IHEC received just 544 complaints for well over half a million voters. Jodah explained that of these complaints, only one might have potentially affected the election results and it was immediately investigated by the IHEC Board of Commissioners in Baghdad. According to Jodah, the complainant, surprised at the attention his actions had received, subsequently admitted he had filed the bogus charge to harass the polling station manager for personal reasons. The individual dropped the charges and IHEC subsequently released that station's ballots for counting. Virtually all of the remaining 543 complaints were related to voter names either missing or varying from those on the registration list.

Dismisses "Iranian" Rumors

¶5. (C) Jodah dismissed rumors that Iranians had switched legitimate ballot boxes with fakes, loaded with counterfeit votes. "These charges are silly," he exclaimed, adding that if Iranians were fixing the election, ISCI's coalition "Al Shahid Al Mihrab List and Independent Power" would have performed much better. Jodah opined that claims of Iranian meddling didn't make sense, as Iran would not have supported Prime Minister Maliliki's State of Law coalition, which was the clear winner. He pointed out the many fraud-prevention mechanisms in place to

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prevent such a scenario, including observers at all 3,673 provincial polling stations and strict accountability of all election materials.

¶6. (C) Jodah hypothesized that the "ballot box" rumor originated from the arrest of a man traveling with various IHEC forms in his vehicle. Jodah said when police contacted him and described the seized boxes, he immediately recognized them as boxes of IHEC forms 141, 142, and 143, which are used for recording vote tallies. The supposed "ballot boxes," he said, were made of cardboard and did not resemble ballot boxes at all. The police released the man after receiving Jodah's information. [Comment: Several REO contacts have recounted this rumor during meetings, believing it to be true. End comment.]

¶7. (C) Jodah also commented that representatives from 15 political entities held a press conference on February 10, demanding a recount of the vote. The representatives, almost none of whom gained as much as a single seat on the Provincial Council, insisted that fraud was involved because the preliminary election results did not match their expectations. (Subject of Septel.)

¶8. (C) Comment: Jodah's prediction of an election day absent of large-scale fraud and violence came to fruition. (See ref tel A.) Complaints were minimal and not a single incidence of violence was reported. Jodah, along with the ISF, deserves most of the credit for this success. Throughout pre-election preparations, Jodah was extremely attentive and conscientious. He recognized the importance of the voter registration period and when turnout was unacceptably low, he launched a major registration drive and extended the period an additional two weeks. Despite increased registration, turnout in Basra was still relatively disappointing. We believe that moving the registration date closer to the actual election would have increased public participation by taking advantage of the

enthusiasm sparked by election campaigning. End comment.
O'CONNOR